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ON THE EXPONENT OF R -REGULAR PRIMITIVE MATRICES*

M.I. BUENO[†] AND S. FURTADO[‡]

Abstract. Let P_{nr} be the set of n -by- n r -regular primitive $(0, 1)$ -matrices. In this paper, an explicit formula is found in terms of n and r for the minimum exponent achieved by matrices in P_{nr} . Moreover, matrices achieving that exponent are given in this paper. Gregory and Shen conjectured that $b_{nr} = \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$ is an upper bound for the exponent of matrices in P_{nr} . Matrices achieving the exponent b_{nr} are presented for the case when n is not a multiple of r . In particular, it is shown that $b_{2r+1,r}$ is the maximum exponent attained by matrices in $P_{2r+1,r}$. When n is a multiple of r , it is conjectured that the maximum exponent achieved by matrices in P_{nr} is strictly smaller than b_{nr} . Matrices attaining the conjectured maximum exponent in that set are presented. It is shown that the conjecture is true when $n = 2r$.

Key words. r -Regular matrices, Primitive matrices, Exponent of primitive matrices.

AMS subject classifications. 05C20, 05C50, 15A36.

1. Introduction. A nonnegative square matrix A is called *primitive* if there exists a positive integer k such that A^k is positive. The smallest such k is called the *exponent of A* . We denote the exponent of a primitive matrix A by $\exp(A)$.

A $(0,1)$ -matrix A is said to be r -regular if every column sum and every row sum is constantly r .

Consider the set P_{nr} of all primitive r -regular $(0, 1)$ -matrices of order n , where $2 \leq r \leq n$. Notice that, for $n > 1$, n -by- n 1-regular matrices are permutation matrices, which are not primitive. An interesting problem is to find the following two positive integers:

$$l_{nr} = \min\{\exp(A) : A \in P_{nr}\}, \quad \text{and} \quad u_{nr} = \max\{\exp(A) : A \in P_{nr}\},$$

as well as finding matrices attaining those exponents. In this paper, we call the integers l_{nr} and u_{nr} the optimal lower bound and the optimal upper bound for the exponent of matrices in P_{nr} , respectively.

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In the literature, numerous papers can be found about good upper bounds for the exponent of general primitive matrices A of order n . In [8] Wielandt stated, without proof, that

$$\exp(A) \leq (n - 1)^2 + 1.$$

Recently, the proof was found in Wielandt's unpublished diaries and published in [5]. There are many improvements of Wielandt's bound for special classes of primitive matrices. The problem of finding an upper bound for the exponent of matrices in P_{nr} has been considered by several authors in Discrete Mathematics, in particular, by some researchers in Graph Theory [2, 4, 6, 7]. In the literature, several such bounds can be found. In [4], it is shown that $\exp(A) \leq \frac{2n(3n-2)}{(r+1)^2} - \frac{n+2}{r+1}$. In [7], it is shown that, if $A \in P_{nr}$, then $\exp(A) \leq 3n^2/r^2$. Also, it is conjectured there that, if $A \in P_{nr}$, then $\exp(A) \leq \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$, where $\lfloor \cdot \rfloor$ denotes the *floor* function, that rounds a number to the next smaller integer. J. Shen proved that this conjecture is true when $r = 2$ [6], however it remains open for $r > 2$.

In this paper, we give an explicit expression for l_{nr} in terms of n and r , and construct matrices attaining that exponent. We also construct matrices whose exponent is $\lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$ when $n = gr + c$, with $0 < c < r$, which proves that $u_{nr} \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$ in those cases. Moreover, we prove that $u_{nr} = \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$ when $g = 2$ and $c = 1$. When $n = gr$, with $g = 2$, we determine u_{nr} ; when $g \geq 3$, we give a conjecture for the value of u_{nr} and present matrices achieving the conjectured optimal upper bound exponent. According to this conjecture, u_{nr} would be smaller than $\lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$.

2. Notation and Auxiliary Results. In the sequel we will use the following notation: If A is an n -by- m matrix, we denote by $A(i, j)$ the entry of A in the position (i, j) . By $A(i_1 : i_2, j_1 : j_2)$, with $i_2 \geq i_1$ and $j_2 \geq j_1$, we denote the submatrix of A lying in rows $i_1, i_1 + 1, \dots, i_2$ and columns $j_1, j_1 + 1, \dots, j_2$. We abbreviate $A(i_1 : i_2, j_1 : j_2)$ to $A(i_1, j_1 : j_2)$ and $A(1 : n, j_1 : j_2)$ to $A(:, j_1 : j_2)$. Similar abbreviations are used for the columns of A . The m -by- n matrix whose entries are all equal to one is denoted by J_{mn} . Unspecified entries in matrices are represented by a $*$.

Some of the proofs in this paper involve the concept of digraph associated with a $(0, 1)$ -matrix.

DEFINITION 2.1. *Let A be a $(0, 1)$ -matrix of size n -by- n . The digraph $G(A)$ associated with A is the directed graph with vertex set $V = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ and arc set E where $(i, j) \in E$ if and only if $A(i, j) = 1$.*

Notice from the previous definition that A is the adjacency matrix of $G(A)$.

A digraph G is said to be r -regular if and only if its adjacency matrix is an

r -regular matrix. Note that the outdegree and the indegree of each vertex of an r -regular digraph are exactly r . A digraph is said to be primitive if and only if its adjacency matrix is primitive. Clearly, for $A \in P_{nr}$, $\exp(A) = k$ if and only if any two vertices in $G(A)$ are connected by a walk of length k and, if $k > 1$, there are at least two vertices that are not connected by a walk of length $k - 1$.

It is important to notice that if A is an r -regular primitive matrix and $B = P^T A P$ for some permutation matrix P , then, for any positive integer k , $B^k = P^T A^k P$. Thus, $\exp(A) = \exp(B)$. Also $G(A)$ and $G(B)$ are isomorphic digraphs. Therefore, throughout the paper, we will work on the set of equivalence classes under permutation similarity. Notice also that $A \in P_{nr}$ if and only $A^t \in P_{nr}$.

Next we include some simple observations about r -regular primitive matrices that will be useful to prove some of the main results in the paper.

LEMMA 2.2. *Let $A \in P_{n,r}$ and let k be any positive integer. Then, every row of A^k contains at most r^k nonzero entries.*

Proof. We prove the result by induction on k . Let $A \in P_{n,r}$. Then, every row of A contains r nonzero entries since A is r -regular. Therefore, the result is true for $k = 1$.

Assume that every row of A^{k-1} contains at most r^{k-1} nonzero entries. Then, any $r \times n$ submatrix of A^{k-1} has at most r^k nonzero columns. Because $A^k = A A^{k-1}$, the result follows. \square

LEMMA 2.3. *Let $A \in P_{nr}$ and let $k > 1$ be a positive integer. If $A^k(i, j) = 0$, then there are at least r zero entries in the i -th row of A^{k-1} ; also there are at least r zero entries in the j -th column of A^{k-1} .*

Proof. Notice that $A^k(i, j) = A^{k-1}(i, :)A(:, j) = 0$. Since A is r -regular, r entries of $A(:, j)$ are ones. Taking into account that $A^{k-1}(i, :) \geq 0$, the first result follows. The second claim can be proven in a similar way taking into account that $A^k(i, j) = A(i, :)A^{k-1}(:, j) = 0$. \square

LEMMA 2.4. *Let $A \in P_{nr}$ and $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$. Then, the number of nonzero entries in the i -th row (column) of A^k , $k \geq 1$, is a nondecreasing sequence in k .*

Proof. Suppose that in the i -th row of A^k there are exactly s nonzero entries. We want to show that in the i -th row of A^{k+1} there are at least s nonzero entries. Denote by S the set $\{j \in \{1, \dots, n\} : A^k(i, j) \neq 0\}$. Since the outdegree of each node of $G(A)$ is exactly r , there are rs arcs with origin in the vertices in S . Since the indegree of each node of G is exactly r , then the rs arcs with origin in S have their terminus in at least $rs/r = s$ vertices. Thus, with origin in the i -th node of $G(A)$, there are walks of length $k + 1$ to at least s distinct vertices. The result for columns follows taking

into account that $A^t \in P_{nr}$. \square

Note that the last lemma implies that each row (column) of A^k has at least r nonzero entries.

If $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ is such that $A(i, i) = 1$, then Lemma 2.4 may be refined. We consider this situation in the next lemma, as it will allow us to get an interesting corollary. We assume that $n \geq 2r$ since, by Lemma 2.3, if $n < 2r$, $A^2(i, :)$ is positive.

LEMMA 2.5. *Let $A \in P_{nr}$, with $n \geq 2r$, and $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$. Suppose that $A(i, i) = 1$. Let s_k be the number of nonzero entries in $A^k(i, :)$, $k \geq 1$. If $s_k < n$, then the number of nonzero entries in the i -th row of A^{k+1} is at least $s_k + 1$. In particular, the i -th row of A^{n-2r+3} is positive.*

Proof. By a possible permutation similarity of A , we assume that $i = 1$ and $A(1, :) = [J_{1r} \ 0]$. Let $k \in \{2, \dots, n\}$. Clearly, the first r entries of $A^k(1, :)$ are nonzero. If $k = 2$, since A is not reducible, $A^2(1, :)$ has more than r nonzero entries. Now suppose that $k > 2$ and $s_k < n$. With a possible additional permutation similarity, we assume, without loss of generality, that $A^k(1, :) = [a_1 \ \dots \ a_{s_k} \ 0]$, where $a_i > 0$, $i = 1, \dots, s_k$. We show that $s_{k+1} \geq s_k + 1$. Suppose that $A^{k-1}(1, :) = [b_1 \ \dots \ b_n]$, where $b_1, b_2, \dots, b_r, b_{i_1}, \dots, b_{i_{s_k-1-r}}$ are positive integers, with $r < i_1 < \dots < i_{s_k-1-r} \leq n$. Because $A^k = AA^{k-1}$, then $i_{s_k-1-r} \leq s_k$; also, as $A^k = A^{k-1}A$ then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} J_{1r} & 0 & 0 \\ * & R_{11} & 0 \\ * & R_{21} & R_{22} \\ * & R_{31} & R_{32} \end{bmatrix},$$

for some blocks R_{ij} , where R_{11} and R_{22} are $(r-1)$ -by- (s_k-r) and (s_k-r) -by- $(n-s_k)$ matrices, respectively. Since all the entries of

$$[b_2 \ \dots \ b_n] [R_{11}^t \ R_{21}^t \ R_{31}^t]^t$$

are nonzero, then also all the entries of

$$[a_2 \ \dots \ a_{s_k} \ 0] [R_{11}^t \ R_{21}^t \ R_{31}^t]^t$$

are nonzero, which implies that $A^{k+1}(1, i) \neq 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, s_k$. Since A is not reducible, it also follows that R_{22} is nonzero. Therefore, $A^{k+1}(1, :)$ has at least $s_k + 1$ nonzero entries. Clearly, $A^{n-2r+2}(1, :)$ has at most $r - 1$ zero entries, which implies, by Lemma 2.3, that $A^{n-2r+3}(1, :)$ is positive. \square

The next result is a simple consequence of Lemma 2.5. It gives an upper bound for the exponent of matrices in P_{nr} with nonzero trace. Another such upper bound

can be found in [4]: if $A \in P_{nr}$ has p nonzero diagonal entries, then $\exp(A) \leq \max\{2(n-r+1)-p, n-r+1\}$. It is easy to check that there are values of n and r for which the upper bound given in Corollary 2.6 for the exponent of matrices with nonzero trace is smaller than those in [4] and [7]. Check with $n=30$ and $r=15$, for instance.

COROLLARY 2.6. *Let $A \in P_{nr}$, with $n \geq 2r$, and suppose that $\text{trace}(A) \neq 0$. Then, $\exp(A) \leq 2n - 4r + 6$.*

Proof. Let $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ be such that $A(i, i) \neq 0$. According to Lemma 2.5, the i -th row and the i -th column of A^{n-2r+3} have no zero entries. Therefore, from any vertex in $G(A)$ there is a walk of length $n - 2r + 3$ to vertex i ; also, there is a walk of length $n - 2r + 3$ from vertex i to any vertex. Thus, any two vertices are connected by a walk of length $2n - 4r + 6$. \square

Finally, we include the following technical lemma.

LEMMA 2.7. *Let D_{rk} , $k < r$, denote an r -by- k matrix with exactly $r - 1$ nonzero entries in each column. Then, at least one row of D_{rk} has no zero entries. Moreover, if $k < r - 1$, then at least two rows of D_{rk} have no zero entries.*

Proof. Notice that the number t of nonzero entries in D_{rk} is $k(r - 1)$ since every column contains $r - 1$ nonzero entries. Assume that all rows of D_{rk} have at least one zero entry. Then, the number m of zero entries in D_{rk} would be at least r . This implies that

$$t = rk - m \leq rk - r < k(r - 1),$$

which is a contradiction. The second claim can be proven in a similar way. \square

3. Optimal lower bound. In this section, we determine the optimal lower bound l_{nr} for the exponent of matrices in P_{nr} in terms of n and r . We also present matrices achieving this exponent.

LEMMA 3.1. *Let $A \in P_{nr}$. Then,*

$$\exp(A) \geq \lceil \log_r(n) \rceil.$$

Proof. Taking into account Lemma 2.2, each row of A has at most r^k nonzero entries. Since $r^k \geq n$ if and only if $k \geq \log_r(n)$, the result follows. \square

Next we prove that there exist matrices in P_{nr} whose exponent is $\lceil \log_r(n) \rceil$.

DEFINITION 3.2. *Let $B = [b_{ij}]$ be an m -by- n real (complex) matrix. We call the*

indicator matrix of B , which we denote by $M(B)$, the m -by- n $(0, 1)$ -matrix $[\mu_{ij}]$, with $\mu_{ij} = 1$ if $b_{ij} \neq 0$ and $\mu_{ij} = 0$ if $b_{ij} = 0$.

DEFINITION 3.3. Let $v = (v_1, v_2, \dots, v_n)$ be a row vector in \mathbb{R}^n . Let s be an integer such that $0 < s \leq n$. Define the s -shift operator $f_s : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ by

$$f_s(v_1, v_2, \dots, v_n) = (v_{n-s+1}, v_{n-s+2}, \dots, v_n, v_1, v_2, \dots, v_{n-s}).$$

The s -generalized circulant matrix associated with v is the n -by- n matrix whose k -th row is given by $f_s^{k-1}(v)$, for $k = 1, \dots, n$, where f_s^{k-1} denotes the composition of f_s with itself $k - 1$ times.

Note that $f_s^n(v_1, \dots, v_n) = (v_1, \dots, v_n)$, as the position of v_1 after n s -shifts is $ns + 1$ modulo n , that is, 1.

Let $0 < s \leq r$ be an integer. We denote by T_s^{nr} the s -generalized circulant matrix associated with $u_r = \sum_{i=1}^r e_i^t$, where e_i denotes the i -th column of the n -by- n identity matrix. For instance,

$$T_1^{52} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}.$$

LEMMA 3.4. For $r \geq 2$, the matrix T_r^{nr} is r -regular and primitive. Moreover, $\exp(T_r^{nr}) = \lceil \log_r(n) \rceil$.

Proof. First we prove that T_r^{nr} is an r -regular matrix. By construction, it is easy to see that the row sum is constantly r . In order to determine the column sum note that there are exactly nr entries equal to one in T_r^{nr} . We denote by s_i , $i \geq 1$, the remainder of the division of i by n , if i is not a multiple of n , and $s_i = n$ otherwise. By construction again, the ones in the i -th row occur in positions $s_{(i-1)r+1}, \dots, s_{ir}$. The sequence of columns in which the ones occur, starting in the first row, then the second row and so on, is just the sequence $s_1, s_2, s_3, \dots, s_{nr}$, that is, $1, \dots, n, 1, \dots, n, \dots, 1, \dots, n$. Clearly, each $j \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ appears exactly r times in that sequence.

Now we prove that T_r^{nr} is primitive by computing its exponent. We first show, by induction on k , that the first $\min\{n, r^k\}$ entries of the first row of $(T_r^{nr})^k$ are nonzero and, if $r^k < n$, the last $n - r^k$ entries of the first row of $(T_r^{nr})^k$ are zero. If $k = 1$, this claim is trivially true. Now suppose that the claim is valid for $k = p$. Note that, for each integer $1 \leq k \leq n$, all the columns of the submatrix of T_r^{nr} indexed by the first r^k rows and the first $\min\{n, r^{k+1}\}$ columns are nonzero. Also, if $r^{k+1} < n$, the

submatrix of T_r^{nr} indexed by the first r^k rows and the last $n - r^{k+1}$ columns is 0. Taking into account this observation, it follows that the first $\min\{n, r^{p+1}\}$ entries of $(T_r^{nr})^{p+1}(1 \cdot) = (T_n^{nr})^p(1, \cdot)T_r^{nr}$ are nonzero while the last $n - \min\{n, r^{p+1}\}$ are zero.

Using similar arguments, we can show that, in general, the i -th row of $M((T_r^{nr})^k)$ is $f_r^{(i-1)r^{k-1}}(u_k)$, where $u_k = \sum_{j=1}^{\min\{r^k, n\}} e_j^t$.

Therefore, any row of $(T_r^{nr})^k$ has exactly $\min\{r^k, n\}$ nonzero entries. Thus, $(T_r^{nr})^k$ is positive if and only if $r^k \geq n$, which implies the result. \square

THEOREM 3.5. *Suppose that $2 \leq r \leq n$. Then, $l_{rn} = \lceil \log_r(n) \rceil$.*

Proof. Follows from Lemma 3.1 and Lemma 3.4. \square

4. Optimal upper bound. Although stated in terms of graphs, the following conjecture is given in [7]: If $A \in P_{nr}$, then $\exp(A) \leq \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$. In [6] this conjecture was proven for $r = 2$. Notice that this conjecture is trivially true for $r \geq \frac{n+1}{2}$. Hence, in the sequel we assume that $n \geq 2r$.

Given any $g \geq 2$, an r -regular primitive digraph with $n = gr + 1$ vertices whose exponent is $\lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$ can be found in [7]. A matrix with such a graph is the following:

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{rr} & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & J_{rr} & \cdots & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & J_{1r} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & T_1^{r,r-1} & J_{r1} & 0 \end{bmatrix}. \tag{4.1}$$

In the next two subsections we generalize the structure of the matrix A by defining the matrices E_{nr} for all possible combinations of n and r .

4.1. The case in which n is not a multiple of r . Generalizing the structure of the matrix in (4.1), in this section we define the n -by- n matrices E_{nr} , when $n = gr + c$ for some positive integers $g \geq 2$ and $0 < c < r$, as follows:

$$E_{nr} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{cr} & 0 & 0 \\ T_1^{r,r-c} & J_{rc} & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad \text{if } n = 2r + c, \quad (4.2)$$

$$E_{nr} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{rr} & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & J_{rr} & \cdots & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & J_{rr} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & J_{cr} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & T_1^{r,r-c} & J_{rc} & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad (4.3)$$

$$\text{if } n = gr + c, \text{ with } g \geq 3. \quad (4.4)$$

Note that we can replace $T_1^{r,r-c}$ by any matrix in $P_{r,r-c}$ without changing the exponent of E_{nr} .

Next we show that $\exp(E_{nr}) = \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$, which implies that $u_{nr} \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$. We then prove the equality when $g = 2$ and $c = 1$.

LEMMA 4.1. *If $n = 2r + c$, where $0 < c < r$, then $\exp(E_{nr}) = \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1 = 5$.*

Proof. It is easy to check that

$$M(E_{nr}^2) = \begin{bmatrix} J_{rr} & J_{rc} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & J_{cr} \\ J_{rr} & 0 & J_{rr} \end{bmatrix}, \quad M(E_{nr}^3) = \begin{bmatrix} J_{rr} & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{cr} & J_{cc} & 0 \\ J_{rr} & J_{rc} & J_{rr} \end{bmatrix},$$

$$M(E_{nr}^4) = \begin{bmatrix} J_{rr} & J_{rc} & J_{rr} \\ J_{cr} & 0 & J_{cr} \\ J_{rr} & J_{rc} & J_{rr} \end{bmatrix}.$$

Finally, we get that $M(E_{nr}^5) = J_{nn}$, which implies the result. \square

LEMMA 4.2. *If $n = gr + c$, with $g \geq 3$ and $0 < c < r$, then $\exp(E_{nr}) = \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1 = g^2 + 1$.*

Proof. Consider the digraph G associated with E_{nr} . Let us group the vertices of G in the following way: We call B_1 the set of vertices from $(g-1)r + c + 1$ to $gr + c$; we call B_2 the set of vertices from $(g-1)r + 1$ to $(g-1)r + c$; we call B_i , $i = 3, \dots, g+1$, the set of vertices from $(g-i+1)r + 1$ to $(g-i+2)r$.

Suppose that u and v are two vertices in the same block B_i . Then there is a path from u to v of length g and another one of length $g + 1$, except if $u, v \in B_2$,

in which case there is just a path of length $g + 1$. Therefore, a walk from u to v has length t if and only if $t = \alpha g + \beta(g + 1)$, for some nonnegative integers α, β , with $\beta > 0$ if $u, v \in B_2$. In particular, no vertex in B_2 lies on a closed walk of length g^2 since $\alpha g + \beta(g + 1) = g^2$ implies $\beta = 0$. Thus, $\exp(E_{nr}) > g^2$.

Because

$$g^2 + 1 = (g - 1)g + (g + 1),$$

it follows that there is a walk of length $g^2 + 1$ from any vertex to any other in the same block B_i , $i = 1, \dots, g + 1$.

Now consider a vertex u in B_i and a vertex v in B_j , where $i, j \in \{1, \dots, g + 1\}$ and $i \neq j$. Let s be the distance from u to v . Note that $s \leq g$. We will show that there is a walk of length $g^2 + 1$ from u to v . Suppose that $s > 1$. In this case we have

$$g^2 - s + 1 = (s - 2)g + (g - s + 1)(g + 1).$$

Thus, u lies on a closed walk of length $g^2 - s + 1$, which implies that there is a walk of length $g^2 + 1$ from u to v .

Now suppose that $s = 1$. If $u \notin B_2$, u lies on a closed walk of length g^2 , which implies that there is a walk of length $g^2 + 1$ from u to v . If $u \in B_2$, then $v \in B_3$ and v lies on a closed walk of length g^2 , which implies that there is a walk of length $g^2 + 1$ from u to v .

We have shown that the vertices in B_2 do not lie on any closed walk of length g^2 . On the other hand, between any two vertices there is a walk of length $g^2 + 1$. Thus $E_{nr}^{g^2}$ is not positive, while $E_{nr}^{g^2+1}$ is positive. Therefore, $\exp(E_{nr}^{g^2+1}) = g^2 + 1$. \square

The following theorem follows in a straightforward way from Lemmas 4.1 and 4.2.

THEOREM 4.3. *If $n = gr + c$, with $0 < c < r$, then $u_{nr} \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$.*

We now show that, when $n = 2r + 1$, $u_{nr} = \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$.

THEOREM 4.4. *Let $n = 2r + 1$. Then, $u_{nr} = \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1 = 5$.*

Proof. Clearly, by Theorem 4.3, $u_{nr} \geq 5$. We now show that if $A \in P_{nr}$ and $\exp(A) > 4$, then $\exp(A) = 5$, which means that there are no matrices in P_{nr} with exponent greater than 5, and, therefore, $u_{nr} = 5$. The strategy we follow allows us to characterize, up to a permutation similarity, all the matrices in P_{nr} that achieve exponent 5.

Suppose that $\exp(A) \geq 5$. Then, there is a zero entry in A^4 . Without loss of generality, we can assume that $A^4(1, i) = 0$ for some $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$. Applying Lemma 2.3 repeatedly, we deduce that there are at least r zero entries in the first row of A^3 and A^2 .

By a convenient permutation similarity on A , we can reduce the proof to the next two cases (and subcases). Throughout the proof, we denote by D_{rk} an r -by- k matrix with exactly $r-1$ nonzero entries in each column and by C_{rr} a matrix in $P_{r,r-1}$.

Case 1. Let us assume that $A(1, :) = [J_{1r} \ 0]$. Then, $A^2(1, i) \neq 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, r$ and we can assume that $A^2(1, r+2 : n) = 0$. Therefore,

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} J_{1r} & 0 & 0_{1r} \\ * & R_1 & 0_{r-1,r} \\ * & * & D_{r+1,r} \end{bmatrix},$$

for some $(r-1)$ -by-1 block R_1 . If R_1 is zero, clearly A is reducible, which is a contradiction. If R_1 is nonzero, then $M(A^2)(1, :) = [J_{1,r+1} \ 0_{1,r}]$ and $A^3(1, i) = A^2(1, :)A(:, i) \neq 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, r+1$. Since $A^3(1, :)$ contains at least r zero entries then $M(A^3)(1, :) = [J_{1,r+1} \ 0_{1,r}]$, which implies that $D_{r+1,r}(1, :) = 0$. Thus,

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} J_{1r} & 0 & 0_{1r} \\ C_{rr} & J_{r1} & 0_{rr} \\ 0_{rr} & 0_{r1} & J_{rr} \end{bmatrix}$$

is reducible, which is again a contradiction.

Case 2. Let us assume now that $A(1, :) = [0 \ J_{1r} \ 0_{1r}]$. Notice that there is $i \in \{r+2, \dots, n\}$ such that $A^2(1, i) \neq 0$, otherwise $A(1 : r+1, r+2 : n) = 0$, and A would be reducible. This observation leads to the following subcases:

Subcase 2.1. Assume that $A^2(1, i) = 0$ for $i = 1, r+2, \dots, n-1$. Then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & C_{rr} & 0 & J_{r1} \\ J_{r1} & 0 & J_{r,r-1} & 0 \end{bmatrix}.$$

A calculation shows that $\exp(A) = 3$, which is a contradiction.

Subcase 2.2. Let us assume that $A^2(1, i) = 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, k+1, r+2, \dots, 2r-k$, with $0 < k < r-1$. Then,

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1k} & J_{1,r-k} & 0_{1,r-k-1} & 0_{1,k+1} \\ 0_{r1} & 0_{rk} & R_1 & 0_{r,r-k-1} & R_2 \\ J_{r1} & D_{rk} & * & J_{r,r-k-1} & R_3 \end{bmatrix},$$

for some blocks R_i , $i = 1, 2, 3$. Taking into account Lemma 2.7, each column of R_1 and R_2 is nonzero, which implies that $A^2(1, i) \neq 0$ for $i = k+2, \dots, r+1, 2r-k$

$k + 1, \dots, n$. Since $A^2(1, :)$ has at least r entries equal to zero, then $M(A^2)(1, :) = [0_{1,k+1} \ J_{1,r-k} \ 0_{r-k-1} \ J_{1,k+1}]$. Note that the submatrix of $[R_2^t \ R_3^t]^t$ indexed by rows $k + 1, \dots, r, 2r - k, \dots, 2r$ has all columns nonzero, otherwise A would not be r -regular. Thus, $A^3(1, i) = A^2(1, :)A(:, i) \neq 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, k + 1, r + 2, \dots, n$, and $A^3(1, :)$ would not have r zero entries, a contradiction.

Subcase 2.3. Let us assume that $A^2(1, i) = 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, r$. Then,

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1,r-1} & 1 & 0_{1r} \\ 0_{r1} & 0_{r,r-1} & R_1 & R_2 \\ J_{r1} & D_{r,r-1} & * & * \end{bmatrix},$$

for some blocks R_i , $i = 1, 2$. Taking into account Lemma 2.7, all columns of R_2 are nonzero, which implies that $A^2(1, i) \neq 0$ for $i = r + 2, \dots, n$. If $R_1 = 0$, then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{r1} & C_{rr} & 0 \end{bmatrix},$$

and $\exp(A) = 5$. If R_1 is nonzero, then, $M(A^2)(1, :) = [0_{1r} \ J_{1,r+1}]$ and $A^3(1, :) = A^2(1, :)A$ has at most one nonzero entry, which is a contradiction. (Note that the last row of $[R_1 R_2]$ has exactly one zero entry.)

Subcase 2.4. Assume that $A^2(1, i) = 0$ for $i = 2, \dots, r + 1$. Then,

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 \\ * & 0 & * \\ * & D_{rr} & * \end{bmatrix}.$$

Note that, by Lemma 2.4, $A^2(1, :)$ has at least r nonzero entries.

- Let us assume that $A^2(1, :)$ has exactly r nonzero entries. If $M(A^2)(1, :) = [0_{1,r+1} \ J_{1r}]$, then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{r1} & C_{rr} & 0 \end{bmatrix}; \tag{4.5}$$

if $M(A^2)(1, :) = [1 \ 0_{1,r+1} \ J_{1,r-1}]$, then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 & 0 \\ J_{r1} & 0 & 0 & J_{r,r-1} \\ 0 & C_{rr} & J_{r1} & 0 \end{bmatrix}. \tag{4.6}$$

A straightforward computation shows that in both cases $\exp(A) = 5$.

- Let us assume that $A^2(1, :)$ has exactly $r + 1$ nonzero entries. Then, $M(A^2)(1, :) = [1 \ 0_{1r} \ J_{1r}]$ and A has the form

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 \\ R_1 & 0 & R_2 \\ R_3 & D_{rr} & R_4 \end{bmatrix}, \quad (4.7)$$

where R_1 and R_2 are r -by-1 and r -by- r matrices, respectively, with all columns nonzero. Notice also that, since not all rows of D_{rr} sum r , either R_3 or some column in R_4 is nonzero. A calculation shows that $A^3(1, i) \neq 0$ for $i = 2, \dots, r + 1$. Moreover, there is another nonzero entry in $A^3(1, :)$. If $A^3(1, :) = [J_{1,r+1} \ 0_{1r}]$, then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{r1} & C_{rr} & 0 \end{bmatrix};$$

if $A^3(1, :) = [0 \ J_{1,r+1} \ 0_{1,r-1}]$, then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 & 0 \\ J_{r1} & 0 & 0 & J_{r,r-1} \\ 0 & C_{rr} & J_{r1} & 0 \end{bmatrix}.$$

In both cases, $\exp(A) = 5$.

Subcase 2.5. Let us assume that $A^2(1, i) = 0$ for $i = 2, \dots, k + 1, r + 2, \dots, 2r - k + 1$, with $0 < k < r$. Then,

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1k} & J_{1,r-k} & 0_{1,r-k} & 0_{1k} \\ R_1 & 0_{rk} & * & 0_{r,r-k} & R_2 \\ * & D_{rk} & * & J_{r,r-k} & * \end{bmatrix},$$

for some blocks R_i , $i = 1, 2$. Taking into account Lemma 2.7, each column of R_1 and R_2 is nonzero. Then, $A^2(1, i) \neq 0$ for $i = 1, 2r - k + 2, \dots, n$, which implies that $A^3(1, i) = A^2(1, :)A(:, i) \neq 0$, for $i = 2, \dots, 2r - k + 1$. Since $A^3(1, :)$ has at least r zero entries, then $r - 1 \leq k < r$, that is, $k = r - 1$. Therefore,

$$M(A^2)(1, :) = [1 \ 0_{1,r-1} \ * \ 0 \ J_{1,r-1}].$$

- If $M(A^2)(1, :) = [1 \ 0_{1,r-1} \ 0 \ 0 \ J_{1,r-1}]$, then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0 & 0_{1,r-1} \\ J_{r1} & 0_{rr} & 0_{r1} & J_{r,r-1} \\ 0_{r1} & C_{rr} & J_{r1} & 0_{r,r-1} \end{bmatrix}.$$

A calculation shows that $\exp(A) = 5$.

- If $M(A^2)(1, :) = [1 \ 0_{1,r-1} \ 1 \ 0 \ J_{1,r-1}]$, then

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1,r-1} & 1 & 0 & 0_{1,r-1} \\ * & 0_{r,r-1} & * & 0_{r1} & * \\ * & D_{r,r-1} & * & J_{r1} & * \end{bmatrix}$$

and $M(A^3)(1, 2 : r + 2) = J_{1,r+1}$. Because $A^3(1, :)$ has at least r zero entries, it follows that $M(A^3)(1, :) = [0 \ J_{1,r+1} \ 0_{1,r-1}]$. Since $A^2(1, r + 1) \neq 0$, then $A^3(1, i) = A^2(1, :)A(:, i) = 0$ implies $A(r + 1, i) = 0$. Thus, $A(r + 1, i) = 0$, for $i = 1, \dots, r, r + 2, \dots, n$, and the $(r + 1)$ -th row of A would have at least $2r$ entries equal to 0, which contradicts the fact that A is r -regular. \square

Notice that, according to the proof of Theorem 4.4, the only “types” of matrices in $P_{2r+1,r}$ (up to a permutation similarity) that achieve maximum exponent are

$$A_1 := \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{1r} & 0 & 0 \\ C_{rr} & J_{r1} & 0 \end{bmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad A_2 := \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ C_{rr} & J_{r1} & 0 \\ J_{1r} & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}.$$

Clearly, if C_{rr} is chosen equal to $T_1^{r,r-1}$, then $A_1 = E_{2r+1,r}$.

Note that the matrix A_2 has nonzero trace and has maximum exponent among the matrices in $P_{2r+1,r}$. However, Corollary 2.6 shows that, for most combinations of n and r , u_{nr} is not attained by matrices with nonzero trace. In particular, this is true if $n = gr + c$, with $0 < c < r$ and $g > r + \sqrt{r^2 - 4r + 5 + 2c}$, as $2n - 4r + 6 < g^2 + 1$ and, by Theorem 4.3, $u_{nr} \geq g^2 + 1$.

4.2. The case in which n is a multiple of r . Suppose that $n = gr$, for some positive integer $g \geq 2$. Denote by E_{nr} the $n \times n$ matrix given by

$$E_{nr} = H_{2r,r}, \quad \text{if } n = 2r,$$

$$E_{nr} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{rr} \\ H_{2r,r} & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad \text{if } n = 3r,$$

$$E_{nr} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{rr} & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & J_{rr} & \cdots & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & J_{rr} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & H_{2r,r} & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad \text{if } n = gr, \text{ with } g \geq 4,$$

where

$$H_{2r,r} = \begin{bmatrix} J_{r-1,r-1} & J_{r-1,1} & 0_{r-1,1} & 0_{r-1,r-1} \\ J_{1,r-1} & 0 & 1 & 0_{1,r-1} \\ 0_{1,r-1} & 1 & 0 & J_{1,r-1} \\ 0_{r-1,r-1} & 0_{r-1,1} & J_{r-1,1} & J_{r-1,r-1} \end{bmatrix}.$$

We will show that $u_{2r,r} = \exp(E_{2r,2})$. Taking into account the result of some numerical experiments, we also conjecture that, when $n = gr$ for some $g \geq 3$, the matrices E_{nr} achieve the maximum exponent in the set P_{nr} . This conjecture is also reinforced by the following observation. Let us say that the exponent of an n -by- n r -regular matrix A is infinite if A is not primitive. Given $n = gr$, with $g \geq 3$, consider the following cyclic matrix:

$$P_1 = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & J_{rr} \\ J_{rr} & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & J_{rr} & \cdots & 0 & 0 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & J_{rr} & 0 \end{bmatrix}$$

which is irreducible but not primitive and, therefore, has infinite exponent. In [3] it was proven that given two n -by- n r -regular matrices A and B , then B can be gotten from A by a sequence of interchanges on 2-by-2 submatrices of A :

$$L_2 = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \leftrightarrow I_2 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}.$$

The matrix E_{nr} we have constructed has been obtained by applying just one of these interchanges to P_1 . Notice, however, that not any arbitrary interchange in P_1 produces a matrix with maximum exponent.

In particular, our conjecture implies that $u_{nr} < \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$. It is worth to point out that Shen [6] proved that $u_{n2} < \lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor^2 + 1$.

Next we show that, if $n = 2r$, then $u_{nr} = \frac{n(n-r)}{2r^2} + 2 = 3$.

THEOREM 4.5. *Let $r \geq 2$. Then, $u_{2r,r} = 3$.*

Proof. Let $A \in P_{2r,r}$ and suppose that $\exp(A) > 3$. Then, there must exist a zero entry in A^3 . Without loss of generality, we can assume that $A^3(1, i) = 0$ for some $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$. Applying Lemma 2.3, we deduce that there must be at least r zero entries in the first row of A^2 . Without loss of generality, we can assume that one of the next cases holds.

Case 1. Suppose that $A(1, :) = [J_{1r} \ 0_{1r}]$. Then, for A to have exponent larger than 3, $M(A^2)(1, :) = [J_{1r} \ 0_{1r}]$. Taking into account the position of the zeros in the first row of A^2 , we deduce that

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} J_{rr} & 0_{rr} \\ 0_{rr} & J_{rr} \end{bmatrix},$$

which is a reducible matrix.

Case 2. Suppose that $A(1, :) = [0 \ J_{1r} \ 0_{1,r-1}]$. If $A^2(1, 1) = 0$ or $A^2(1, i) = 0$ for some $i \geq r + 1$, then A would not be r -regular. Therefore, for A to have exponent larger than 3, $M(A^2)(1, :) = [1 \ 0_{1r} \ J_{1,r-1}]$. Then,

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & J_{1r} & 0_{1,r-1} \\ J_{r1} & 0_{rr} & J_{r,r-1} \\ 0_{r-1,1} & J_{r-1,r} & 0_{r-1,r-1} \end{bmatrix},$$

which is reducible.

In both cases, we get a contradiction. Thus, for any $A \in P_{2r,r}$, $\exp(A) \leq 3$. Since $E_{2r,r}^2$ is not positive, then $\exp(E_{2r,r}) = 3 = u_{2r,r}$. \square

Next we give the exponent of the matrices E_{nr} when $n = gr$ for some positive integer $g \geq 3$. Before we prove the result, we include a preliminary result.

Let a_1, a_2, \dots, a_p be positive integers such that $\gcd(a_1, \dots, a_p) = 1$. The Frobenius-Schur index, $\phi(a_1, \dots, a_p)$, is the smallest integer such that the equation $x_1 a_1 + \dots + x_p a_p = l$ has a solution in nonnegative integers x_1, x_2, \dots, x_p for all $l \geq \phi(a_1, \dots, a_p)$. The following result is due to Brauer in 1942.

PROPOSITION 4.6. [1] *Let y be a positive integer. Then*

$$\phi(y, y + 1, \dots, y + j - 1) = y \left\lfloor \frac{y + j - 3}{j - 1} \right\rfloor.$$

LEMMA 4.7. *Let $y > 1$ be a positive integer. Then,*

$$\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{2}y^2, & \text{if } y \text{ is even} \\ \frac{1}{2}(y - 1)y, & \text{if } y \text{ is odd.} \end{cases}$$

Moreover, there are nonnegative integers a, b, c satisfying $\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) - 2 = ay + b(y + 1) + c(y + 2)$ if and only if y is even. If y is odd, there are nonnegative integers a, b, c satisfying $\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) - 3 = ay + b(y + 1) + c(y + 2)$.

Proof. The first claim follows from Proposition 4.6. Now we show the second claim. Clearly, if y is even, $\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) - 2 = (\frac{y}{2} - 1)(y + 2)$ can be written as $ay + b(y + 1) + c(y + 2)$ for some nonnegative numbers a, b, c . If y is odd

$$\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) - 3 = \frac{1}{2}(y - 1)y - 3 = \left(\frac{y - 1}{2} - 1\right)(y + 2).$$

which implies that $\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) - 3$ can be written as $ay + b(y + 1) + c(y + 2)$ for some nonnegative integers a, b, c . To see that there are no nonnegative integers a, b, c such that

$$\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) - 2 = ay + b(y + 1) + c(y + 2),$$

notice that the largest number of the form $ay + b(y + 1) + c(y + 2)$, for some nonnegative integers a, b, c , smaller than $\phi(y, y + 1, y + 2)$ is $(\frac{y-1}{2} - 1)(y + 2)$ and

$$\left(\frac{y - 1}{2} - 1\right)(y + 2) < \left(\frac{y - 1}{2} - 1\right)(y + 2) + 3 - 2 = \phi(y, y + 1, y + 2) - 2. \quad \square$$

THEOREM 4.8. *Let $n = gr$, with $g \geq 3$ and $r \geq 2$. Then,*

$$\exp(E_{nr}) = \begin{cases} \frac{n(n-r)}{2r^2} + 2, & \text{if } \frac{n}{r} \text{ is even} \\ \frac{1}{2} \left(\left(\frac{n}{r}\right)^2 + 1 \right), & \text{if } \frac{n}{r} \text{ is odd.} \end{cases}$$

Proof. Consider the digraph G associated with E_{nr} . We group the vertices of G in the following way: for $i = 1, \dots, g$, we call block B_i the set of vertices from $(g - i)r + 1$ to $(g - i + 1)r$. For convenience, we denote the vertices $n - 3r + 1, \dots, n - 2r$ in B_3 by w_1, \dots, w_r , resp; the vertices $n - 2r + 1, \dots, n - r$ in B_2 by v_1, \dots, v_r , resp., and the vertices $n - r + 1, \dots, n$ in B_1 by u_1, \dots, u_r , resp. Let $B'_1 = \{u_2, \dots, u_r\}$, $B'_2 = \{v_2, \dots, v_{r-1}\}$ and $B'_3 = \{w_1, \dots, w_{r-1}\}$. Note that B'_2 is empty if $r = 2$. The digraph G is given in Figure 4.1.

A directed edge in this graph from a set S_1 to a set S_2 means that there is an arc from each vertex in S_1 to each vertex in S_2 .

Let G' be the subgraph of G induced by the vertices in $B_1 \cup B_2 \cup B_3$. The following table gives the possible lengths of a walk in G' from a vertex in B_1 to a vertex in B_3 .

From	To	Possible lengths
u_1	any vertex in B'_3	2, 3
u_1	w_r	1, 2 (if $r > 2$), 3
any vertex in B'_1	any vertex in B'_3	2, 3
any vertex in B'_1	w_r	2, 3

Table 1.

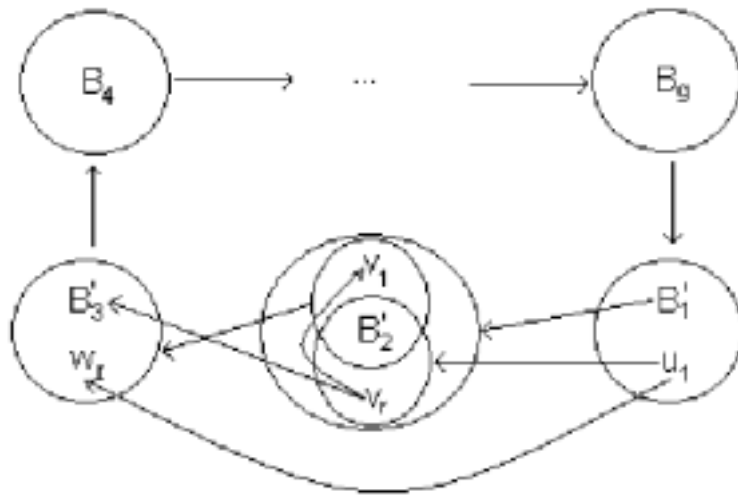


FIG. 4.1.

Thus, for any $i \in \{1, \dots, g\} \setminus \{2\}$, any walk in G from a vertex $u \in B_i$ to a vertex $v \in B_i$ has length t if and only if

$$t = a[(g-2) + 1] + b[(g-2) + 2] + c[(g-2) + 3], \quad (4.8)$$

for some nonnegative integers a, b, c , with $b + c > 0$ if either $u \in B'_1$ or $v \in B'_3$.

Taking into account Lemma 4.7, the smallest nonnegative integer t_0 such that, for any $t \geq t_0$, (4.8) holds for some nonnegative integers a, b, c is

$$t_0 = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{2}(g-1)^2, & \text{if } g \text{ is odd} \\ \frac{1}{2}(g-2)(g-1), & \text{if } g \text{ is even.} \end{cases}$$

We will show that, if g is odd, any two vertices u, v in G are connected by a walk of length $t_0 + g$ but not of length $t_0 + g - 1$; if g is even, any two vertices u, v in G are connected by a walk of length $t_0 + g + 1$ but not of length $t_0 + g$. Denote by $d(u, v)$ the distance from the vertex u to the vertex v . Clearly, $d(u, v) \leq g$.

If $u, v \in B_i$ for some $i \in \{1, \dots, g\} \setminus \{2\}$, with $u = u_1$ if $i = 1$, and $v = w_r$ if $i = 3$, then, for any $t \geq t_0$, there is a walk of length t from u to v .

Suppose that $u, v \in B_2$. Clearly, there is a walk of length 1 from u to some vertex

in B_3 . Also, there is a vertex v' in B_1 such that there is a walk of length 1 from v' to v . Taking into account these observations, and the fact that, for $t \geq t_0$, there is a walk of length t from any vertex in B_3 to w_r , it follows that there is a walk of length $t + (g - 2) + 2 = t + g$ from u to v .

Suppose that $u \in B'_1$ and $v \in B_1$. Notice that there is a walk of length g from u to u_1 . Since, for $t \geq t_0$, there is a walk of length t from u_1 to v , it follows that there is a walk of length $t + g$ from u to v .

Let $u \in B_3$ and $v \in B'_3$. Then, there is a walk of length g from w_r to v . Since, for $t \geq t_0$, there is a walk of length t from u to w_r , then there is a walk of length $t + g$ from u to v .

Now suppose that $u \in B_i$ and $v \in B_j$, with $i \neq j$.

Suppose that $u \notin B'_1 \cup B_2$. Let $w = u$ if $i \neq 3$, and $w = w_r$ otherwise. Then, for $t \geq t_0$, since $g - d(w, v) > 0$, $t + g - d(w, v) \geq t_0$ and there is a walk of length $t + g - d(w, v)$ from u to w . This implies that there is a walk of length $t + g$ from u to v .

Suppose that $u \in B'_1$ and $v \notin B_2 \cup B_3$. Note that $d(w_r, v) \leq g - 2$. Also, there is a walk of length 2 from u to w_r . As, for $t \geq t_0$, w_r lies on a closed walk of length $t + g - d(w_r, v) - 2$, then there is a walk of length $2 + (t + g - d(w_r, v) - 2) + d(w_r, v) = t + g$ from u to v .

Suppose that $u \in B_2$ and $v \notin B'_3$. Then $d(w_r, v) \leq g - 1$. As, for $t \geq t_0$, there is a walk of length $t + g - d(w_r, v) - 1$ from any vertex in B_3 to w_r , then there is a walk of length $1 + (t + g - d(w_r, v) - 1) + d(w_r, v) = t + g$ from u to v .

We have shown that, for any $t \geq t_0$, there is a walk of length $t + g$ from u to v , unless either $u \in B_2$ and $v \in B'_3$, or $u \in B'_1$ and $v \in B_2 \cup B_3$.

In order to determine the exponent of E_{nr} , we now consider two cases, depending on the parity of g .

Case 1. Suppose that g is odd. Notice that every walk in G from v_1 to v_r of length $t > g$ contains a subgraph which is a walk of length $t - g$ from a vertex in B_3 to a vertex in B_3 . Because there is no walk of length $t_0 - 1$ from a vertex in B_3 to a vertex in B_3 , then there is no walk of length $t_0 + g - 1$ from v_1 to v_r .

We have already proven that there is a walk of length $t_0 + g$ from any vertex u to any vertex v , unless either $u \in B_2$ and $v \in B'_3$, or $u \in B'_1$ and $v \in B_2 \cup B_3$, in which cases there is a walk of length s_1 from u to some vertex in B_3 and there is a walk of length s_2 from some vertex in B_1 to v , with $s_1 + s_2 = 4$. By Lemma 4.7, there are

nonnegative integers a, b, c such that

$$t_0 - 2 = \frac{1}{2}(g - 1)^2 - 2 = a(g - 1) + bg + c(g + 1).$$

Thus, from any vertex in B_3 , there is a walk to w_r of length $t_0 - 2$, which implies that there is a walk of length $(t_0 - 2) + (g - 2) + 4 = t_0 + g$ from u to v . Therefore,

$$\exp(E_{n,r}) = t_0 + g = \frac{1}{2}(g^2 + 1) = \frac{1}{2} \left(\binom{n}{r}^2 + 1 \right).$$

Case 2. Suppose that g is even. First, consider the case $u \in B'_1$ and $v \in B_3$. Clearly, there is a walk of length 3 from u to w_r ; also, there is a walk of length 3 from some vertex in B_1 to v . Taking into account Lemma 4.7, w_r lies on a closed walk of length $t_0 - 3$, which implies that there is a walk of length $(t_0 - 3) + (g - 2) + 6 = t_0 + g + 1$ from u to v .

Now suppose that either $u \in B_2$ and $v \in B'_3$, or $u \in B'_1$ and $v \in B_2$. Then, there is a walk of length s_1 from u to some vertex in B_3 and there is a walk of length s_2 from some vertex in B_1 to v , with $s_1 + s_2 = 3$. As, from any vertex in B_3 , there is a walk of length t_0 to w_r , then there is a walk of length $t_0 + (g - 2) + 3 = t_0 + g + 1$ from u to v .

Now we show that there are two vertices not connected by a walk of length $t_0 + g$. Note that $t_0 + g > g + 2$. Also, every walk of length $t > g + 2$ from $u \in B'_1$ to v_r contains a subgraph which is a walk of length $t - g - 1$ or $t - g - 2$ from a vertex in B_3 to a vertex in B_3 . By Lemma 4.7, for $k \in \{1, 2\}$, there are no nonnegative integers such that $t_0 - k = a(g - 1) + bg + c(g + 1)$. So, there is no walk of length $t_0 + g$ from $u \in B'_1$ to v_r .

Thus,

$$\exp(E_{n,r}) = t_0 + g + 1 = \frac{1}{2}(g^2 - g) + 2 = \frac{n(n-r)}{2r^2} + 2. \quad \square$$

If $n = r$, the only matrix in $P_{r,r}$ is J_n which has exponent 1. Note that $n/r = 1$ is odd and $u_{rr} = \frac{1}{2} \left(\binom{n}{r}^2 + 1 \right) = 1$. If $n = 2r$, by Theorem 4.5, $u_{nr} = \frac{n(n-r)}{2r^2} + 2 = 3$. If $n = gr$, with $g \geq 3$ and $r \geq 2$, it follows from Theorem 4.8 that $u_{nr} \geq \exp(E_{nr})$. We conjecture that in this case the equality also holds. Note that $\exp(E_{nr}) < \lfloor \frac{n}{r} \rfloor^2 + 1$.

CONJECTURE 1. *Let $n = gr$ with $g \geq 1$ and $r \geq 2$. Then,*

$$u_{nr} = \begin{cases} \frac{n(n-r)}{2r^2} + 2, & \text{if } \frac{n}{r} \text{ is even} \\ \frac{1}{2} \left(\binom{n}{r}^2 + 1 \right), & \text{if } \frac{n}{r} \text{ is odd.} \end{cases}$$

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